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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

DAY OF GENERAL DISCUSSION: Globalization and its impact on the
enjoyment of economic and social rights

Monday, 11 May 1998

GLOBALIZATION v. GLOBALISM: GIVING INTERNATIONALISM A BAD NAME

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1. The French daily newspaper, Le Monde, described the recent round of national strikes in France as the "First Revolt Against Globalization". Although one could argue that the indigenous peoples' rebellion in Chiapas was the first, these events represent a new era in global politics. Everyday citizens, from the poorest of the poor to the relatively secure, are speaking out against the process that has come to be called "globalization."

2. While these recent events are dramatic, one question remains unanswered: Why have there been so few rebellions and so few public debates until now? I believe the reason is the confusion between globalization and globalism. Many people who have a strong sense of international solidarity and a desire for world peace - beliefs often described as globalism - have become confused when faced with globalization. Globalism and globalization sound similar, but the closer you look the more they seem to be opposites. A French striker put it this way: "The difference between internationalism and globalization is like the difference between making love and rape".

3. One key aspect of globalization is an economic process - corporations move money, factories and goods around the planet at ever more rapid rates of speed, searching for cheaper labour, cheaper raw materials, and weak consumer, labour and environmental protection. Another aspect of globalization is the political ideology - the assumption that humans and the planet will be better off if the global market is left unfettered by ethical, moral, social, or environmental considerations.

4. In contrast, globalism is the belief that we share one fragile planet whose survival requires mutual respect and careful treatment of all its people and its environment. Globalism is also a set of values and ethical beliefs requiring active practice in our day-to-day lives. Active communications to foster understanding, the sharing of resources on the basis of equity and sustainability, and mutual aid in times of need are three central activities that undergird globalism.

5. While globalism incorporates the idea of the "Global Commons" to describe the ozone layer, oceans and genetic diversity, globalization is the exploitation of these resources by giant corporations beyond the reach of democratic processes. While globalism implies respect for diversity, globalization demands the standardization or homogenization of nearly everything and everybody.

6. Understanding and articulating the distinction between globalism and globalization has become incredibly important for two reasons. First, globalization is causing so many problems that we cannot afford to ignore them any longer.

7. Second, true internationalism is the only weapon we still have for tackling the global ecological and social crisis that is being caused by unbridled globalization, including the political violence of war and the personal violence of crime, racism and xenophobia. We need a nearly unprecedented upsurge in international cooperation to tackle the many worldwide problems we now face.

8. In the case of inter-tribal, ethnic and religious wars, a sense of globalism can reduce the xenophobia and chauvinism that bring on these wars. Globalism is also needed in order to encourage others far away from these conflicts to get involved and to share their resources to help resolve them.

9. In the case of personal violence, the creation by globalization of unemployment, landlessness, homelessness and food insecurity induces violence as those deprived struggle to survive and as those with some means of support strike at the "other" whom they fear might drag them down into the same desperate state.

10. As globalization causes greater poverty and hunger, it fuels involuntary emigration, which, in turn, may result in racism and fear of immigrants. In this way, globalization destroys the feelings of globalism, love and concern with neighbours around the planet, while creating the economic and ecological conditions that cry out for more, not less, globalism.

11. My fear is that if we do not challenge globalization, it will not only destroy the ecology and the society, but it will also engender so much resentment, greed and violence that we will no longer have the ability as a people to work together to tackle global problems.

12. Globalization is both creating massive problems (ozone depletion, climate instability, mass migration, etc.) and destroying our ability to cooperate across boundaries and borders to address these very problems. Globalism - the belief that the well-being of each and every neighbour, no matter how far away, affects us all - is the only way to combat the assault of globalization.

13. We face enough natural disasters on this fragile ecosystem we call Earth to challenge our goodwill and our human abilities; we cannot afford to add the destructiveness of globalization. Nor can we afford to allow globalization to turn us away from loving, caring, cooperating, sharing. The fate of our planet rests in the balance.
